

# RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT IN DEMOCRACY: THE COUNCIL'S YOUTUBE LIVE BROADCASTING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS AND RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA

**Contact Officer:** *Mark Braddock*  
**Telephone:** *01895 250470*

## HEADLINES

Resident engagement with Hillingdon's democratic process is at an all-time high. This is evidenced not only through formal ways, such as by the number of petitions submitted and the continuing high satisfaction participating in meetings, but increasingly through digital and social channels such as watching council meetings on YouTube and social media.

All Members will be aware of the YouTube filming of council meetings. This report to the Committee presents a detailed analysis of the broadcasting outcomes for viewers since 2016. In short, it has enabled Hillingdon councillors and local decision-making to take a leap forward in engaging with thousands of Hillingdon residents and others watching in a modern, immersive and direct way.

Members should take note of the analytics section later on in this report which shows some interesting statistics on viewership for broader consideration, along with some ideas for smarter approaches to such digital engagement in the future.

## RECOMMENDATION:

**That the Committee note the report and provide any comments, suggestions or improvements to Democratic Services to take forward as appropriate.**

## INFORMATION

### Background

In early 2016, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services agreed a project to broadcast our main council meetings to increase resident interest and engagement in local democracy. Partly, this was also in response to the need for a definitive record of proceedings given that the public have the legal right to undertake their own filming and recording of meetings.

A Joint Project Team reviewed the options for this and different to most other local authorities who had experimented with webcasting, the Council decided to adapt its existing CCTV and WiFi infrastructure and integrate it with Google technology (YouTube Live) to provide a modern, viewer friendly and cost effective solution. The only one-off expense related to new cameras and a much-needed upgrade of the audio package and microphones in the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms 5 & 6. As YouTube is free to use, there are no annual running costs of broadcasting our council meetings.

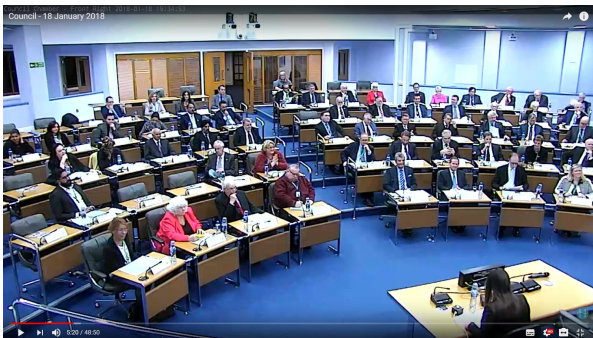
The broadcast studio is located in the Democratic Services Office by the Council Chamber, which controls the live feed(s) coming in and the output via encoding software. To be fully mobile, a laptop can then be used by Democratic Services Officers to control the output feed into YouTube during a meeting, thereby creating the live broadcast. Resilience is very good and technical issues with the broadcasts are rare and out of the one or two that we have experienced it has primarily been down to internal WiFi or audio issues.

Meetings agreed to be broadcast are Full Council meetings, Planning Committees, Licensing Sub-Committees, Cabinet and we have also filmed one Petition Hearing, with the principles behind these being those meetings that involve residents and/or are of major interest to them.

We have the ability to stream three feeds in the Council chamber and individual feeds in each of Committee Rooms 5 & 6 (5 in total). However, currently only three different feeds can be broadcast on YouTube simultaneously which is deemed satisfactory given the official meeting calendar. We currently stream Council meetings using multiple feeds, where viewers can switch between different views to get a 360 degree experience.

The main chamber feed and Mayor feed in the Council Chamber are the only feeds where we have linked up an automatic zoom facility of the camera with the microphones so the camera closes in on those speaking. Below are example feeds:

**Council Chamber - main chamber feed**



**Council Chamber - Mayor feed view**



**Council Chamber - Rear View**



**Planning Committee - CR5**



## Cabinet - CR6



## Licensing Sub-Committee - CR5



### Optics, promotion & searchability

Meetings are extremely simple for Democratic Services staff to set-up to broadcast and they are, by default, promoted one week before the meeting on the Council’s YouTube channel. Attractive, news-style and clean promotional thumbnails (see below) are inserted into YouTube to be used primarily as adverts for each meeting on the different digital platforms/devices residents may interface with. Large backdrops are used in the Committee Rooms to reinforce the professional look of the meeting and promote the Council.



Broadcasts of Full Council and Cabinet meetings are shared via twitter and facebook leading up to the meeting and sometimes during the live broadcast which Democratic Services co-ordinate. This has led to meetings being shared to friends and followers on social media.



The YouTube video page for each meeting has a standard direct link to the agenda for viewers to find out more and also a link to an online version of our feedback form. The live chat and comments facilities available via YouTube during broadcasts have been disabled due to the potential for inappropriate use. Suitable short intro music and 'stings' have been added at the start of the videos to engage viewers and add yet a more professional feel.

Democratic Services Officers also insert Youtube Video Tagging or "key words" into videos. According to YouTube, tagging is one of the most important ways to rank videos in YouTube and other search engine results. Tags help users find videos when they search the site and it has shown to increase overall viewership of our council meetings. Tagging is impartial and relevant to the agenda for the meeting.

For further viewer engagement, Democratic Services sometimes add suitable "cards" and "end screen" promotional material during and at the end of the broadcast. This can sign-post viewers to related content or help promote other council events as shown below.



Cabinet - 27 July 2017

Broadcasts are then archived afterwards on the Council's YouTube channel in a dedicated playlists for each municipal year for ease of chronological reference. As a safeguard, videos are also stored on Google Drive periodically in the event our YouTube channel goes down.

As a public organisation, monetization and external advertisements on YouTube videos have been disabled for obvious reasons. However, this does not prohibit the Council linking videos to other suitable content.

### **Resident feedback**

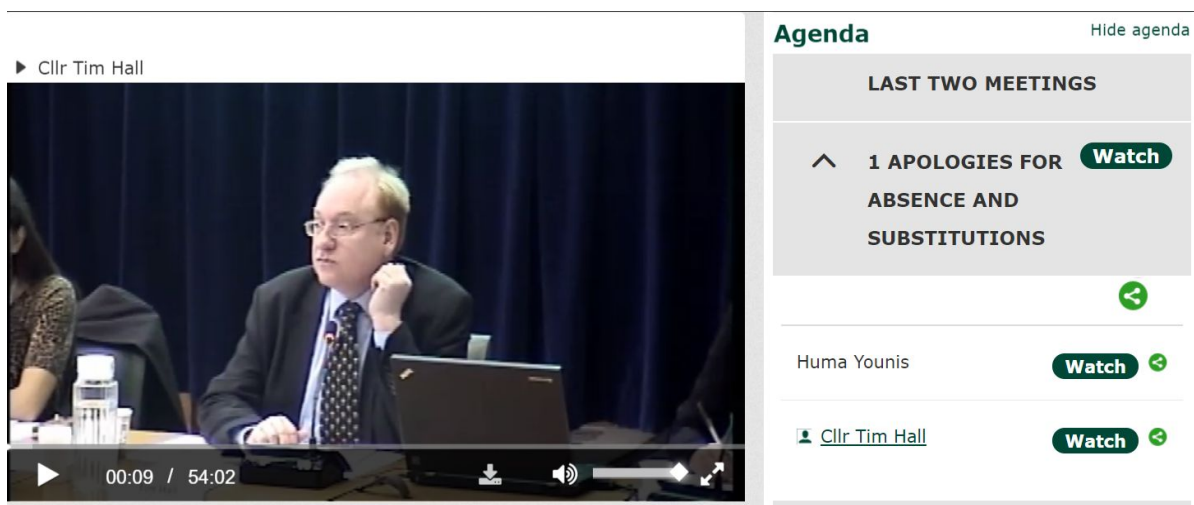
We have not had any negative feedback from residents who attend to speak during live broadcasts. This may be in part because our letters/emails to petitioners, agents etc... sent prior to the meeting provide a range of useful information, including how we broadcast and what it will look like in the room so they can get a good feel for it before they arrive.

## Member views

Whilst Members may have their own individual experiences, it seems generally they have taken to live broadcasting extremely well when attending and speaking in meetings. Chairmen have also ably taken the time to involve online viewers watching at the start of the meeting (along with those in the room attending), by clearly setting out the procedures and indicating where the Councillors and officers are sitting etc... Sometimes, Councillors “wave” at the camera to indicate who they are. All this adds to an engaging and positive viewer experience.

## Local government comparisons

Ongoing research into other local authorities using webcasting show that around 100 UK councils use another bespoke solution called Public-I (see screenshot below). Hillingdon did review this option, and whilst it has the benefit of directly linking the webcast to specific agenda items on the website and councillors speaking, the running costs are high and it could potentially require additional staff resource for each meeting.



In terms of the smaller (yet increasing) number of local authorities using YouTube, Hillingdon is successfully broadcasting on this platform and we have had visits and interest by other local authorities who plan to follow our initiative. To get some idea of how other councils broadcast their meetings on YouTube, visit [Wokingham Borough Council](#), [York City Council](#) and [Monmouthshire County Council](#). Outside the entertainment and music world, the YouTube live broadcast platform is predominantly used in Canada and the United States for live broadcasting of government meetings, from The White House to States and City Councils. Visit [Toronto City Council](#) on YouTube for an interesting international comparison.

## Viewer Analytics

Worldwide, YouTube is the second most visited website in the World (after Google and above Facebook). Data from 2018 indicates it has almost 5 billion videos, with over 30 million visitors per day and in an average month, 8 out of 10 18-49 year-olds watch YouTube. Gender-wise, while YouTube's total user base might be closer to 50/50, studies have found that men make up the majority of viewers in most of YouTube's content categories. More than half of YouTube views come from mobile devices. 'Watchtime' statistics are more relevant to actual “viewers” in

that they better indicate user engagement in the content. People can subscribe to particular channels to be made alert of new videos, show their “thumbs up/or down” on specific videos or share them with colleagues and friends further on social media.

Locally, the Council’s YouTube channel ([Hillingdon London](#)) features a broad range of video content from 2007 including resident, council and events, such as Advent Calendar videos and performances by the Hillingdon Music Service. Since 2016, the broadcasting of council meetings has been the main content provider for our YouTube channel. YouTube offers the ability to pull detailed analytic reports about viewership of any video or group of videos. It is not possible to drill-down data to a Hillingdon level, only UK and abroad. Detailed viewing reports for each municipal year attached as appendices. They are summarised below:

<b>Period: 25 February 2016 - 19 January 2018</b>	
<b>25,444</b>	people have tuned in to watch council meetings on YouTube
<b>12%</b>	watch live on the night/day, 88% watch at a later time (on demand)
<b>169</b>	is the total number of meetings on video (includes multiple feeds for Full Council)
<b>60</b>	minutes is the average length per meeting video
<b>6</b>	minutes is the average viewer engagement time watching videos
<b>205</b>	viewers have shared a council meeting with other friends or followers on social media or by email.
<b>64%</b>	viewing via a computer, 34% on mobile or tablet devices.
<b>1,718</b>	people watched Cabinet on 27 July 2017, being our most watched broadcast, followed by Budget Council on 25 February 2016 (1,255 views)
<b>54% to 79%</b>	are male viewers *
<b>40</b>	being the average age of viewers *

*\*Note: gender and age statistics may not be fully representative as they are captured only from those who have logged into YouTube via a Google account.*

The Council’s YouTube channel has just over 300 subscribers, which is relatively low, but recent growth in it has primarily been gained by people watching council meetings. The vast majority of viewers are from UK, but with some watching from abroad. It is clear that the topics being considered influence viewer engagement. For example, the Licensing Sub-Committee on 23 May 2017 considered the South Ruislip Cineworld application and attracted 574 viewers. The Petition Hearing on Children’s Centres on 1 February 2017 attracted 447 viewers. Generally speaking, the more significant the planning application the higher viewer rate. Trends in viewing during the year show no correlations, other than an increased viewership for Budget

Council meetings each year, which can be easily attributed to greater local interest and social media.

### **Possibilities for increasing viewer engagement**

Live broadcasting has demonstrated a giant leap in the number of residents able to see how decisions are made in Hillingdon - and also in a way that is directly accessible to them through their phones, computers, TVs and even X-boxes.

Democratic Services have been in discussion with Whips previously about enhancements to the viewer experience. For example, for Council meetings we now include a link directly to each Question/Motion etc... as a shortcut for viewers.

Like in mainstream news broadcasts, from the user perspective, understandably it would be helpful for the names of councillors speaking, the title of questions being put etc... to be displayed during the active part of the live broadcast. And for planning committee meetings, the plans and maps shown to Members in the room, to also be displayed in the video to benefit viewers.

Members should be aware that enhancements are largely restricted to the upgrades and changes that YouTube rolls-out across the world. We can be more creative with the live display via the encoding computer directly (not YouTube). However, this would require additional live and post production editing by staff. Therefore, it is advised that such optical improvements are explored when more automation is available to introduce such features.

Other enhancements that could be explored are increasing the promotion to residents of our channel so they can "subscribe" to it. Furthermore, a more targeted promotion of upcoming videos to key stakeholders, e.g. planning agents, residents groups, schools or interest groups depending on topic being discussed would be more relevant and increase viewers. We already seek to do this where possible, for example, if residents submit an electronic petition in relation to a planning application, we can automatically email all signatories with details of the meeting and a link to the broadcast where their petition will be heard.

It should be recognised that all of the above is part of the Council's wider digital efforts to engage with residents about public services, information and events in a more personalised way. Daily, the council communicates with residents online and through social media. There is, therefore, a wider theatre of opportunity to engage yet more residents in local democracy.

### **Financial Implications**

None directly from this report.

### **Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL






# 2015/16 Municipal Year - summary of YouTube analytics for meeting broadcasts

Please note first broadcast was in February 2016 towards the end of the year

## Videos & viewings

 YouTube	No. of broadcasts	Total no. of unique viewers	Av broadcast length	Av total watch time per video (mins)	Watchtime - average time a viewer watches a video	Net subscribers gained	Shares (of video to others)	Likes	Dislikes	Watching Live vs Demand
	11	2,201	N/A	N/A	7.21 mins	4	15	34	2	82% on demand, 18% live
<b>Notes</b>	Includes additional feeds, e.g. council					On council YouTube channel through watching council meetings	Video shared via email, or other social media	Thumbs up watching	Thumbs down watching	Split between those watching live on the night and those afterwards

## Top 5 broadcasts

Meeting	Views
Council Meeting (budget setting) - 25 February 2016	1255
Cabinet - 17 March 2016	273
North Planning Committee - 7pm, 22 March 2016	137
Major Applications Planning Committee - 22 March 2016	133
Cabinet - 21 April 2016	114

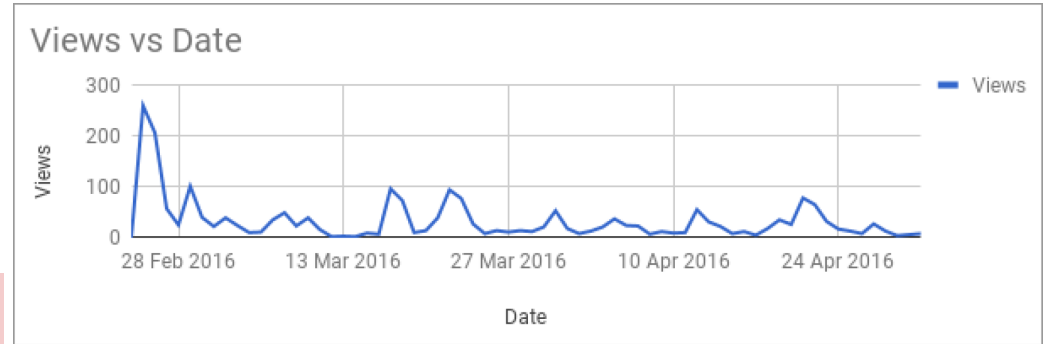
## Geographic

Country	Viewers
United Kingdom	2,067
United States	51
Germany	10
Australia	8
Philippines	8
India	7
Others	50

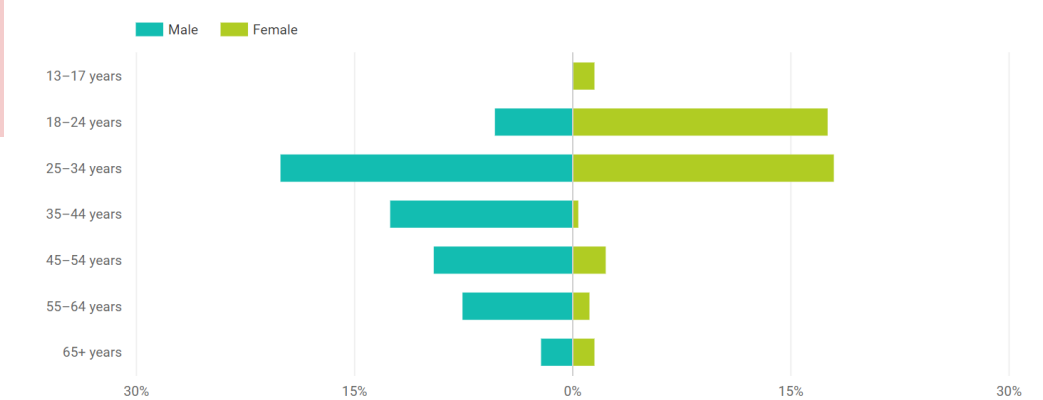
## User playback

Device type	% Views
Computer	67%
Mobile Phone	19%
Tablet	12%
TV	1.40%
Unknown	1.00%
Game console	0.10%

## Trend in views vs time of year



## Gender/Age (Google account users only)



# 2016/17 Municipal Year - summary of YouTube analytics for meeting broadcasts

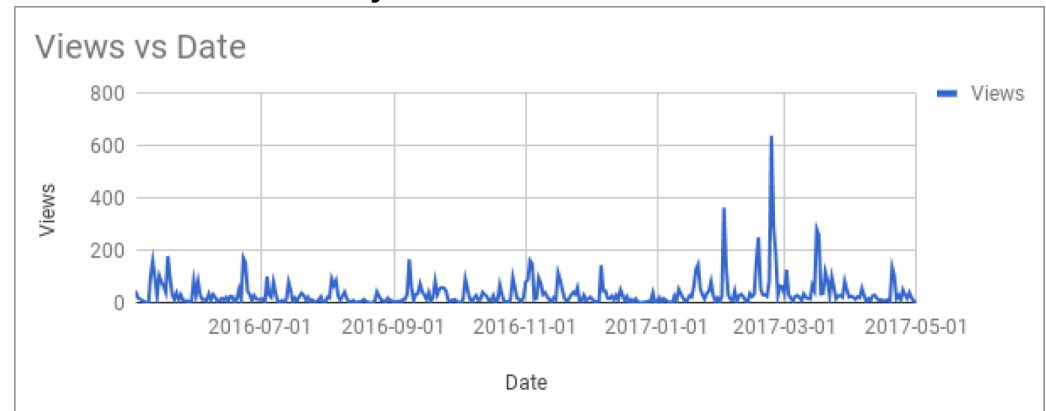
## Videos & viewings

	No. of broadcasts	Total no. of unique viewers	Av broadcast length	Av total watch time per video (mins)	Watchtime - average time a viewer watches a video	Net subscribers gained	Shares (of video to others)	Likes	Dislikes	Watching Live vs Demand
	94	14,002	63 mins	840 mins	5.17 mins	19	98	59	9	91% demand 9% live
<b>Notes</b>	Includes additional feeds, e.g. council					On council YouTube channel through watching council meetings	Video shared via email, or other social media	Thumbs up watching	Thumbs down watching	Split between those watching live on the night and those afterwards

## Top 10 broadcasts

Meeting	Views
Council (Budget Setting) - Part 1 - 23 February 2017	992
Cabinet - 7pm, 16 March 2017	510
Cabinet - 16 February 2017	507
Petition Hearing Children's Centres - 1 February 2017	447
Cabinet - 19 May 2016	420
Council - 8 September 2016	414
Major Applications Planning Committee - 11 May 2016	410
Council AGM - 7:30pm, 12 May 2016	407
Council - 3 November 2016	391
Council - 19 January 2017	298

## Trend in views vs time of year



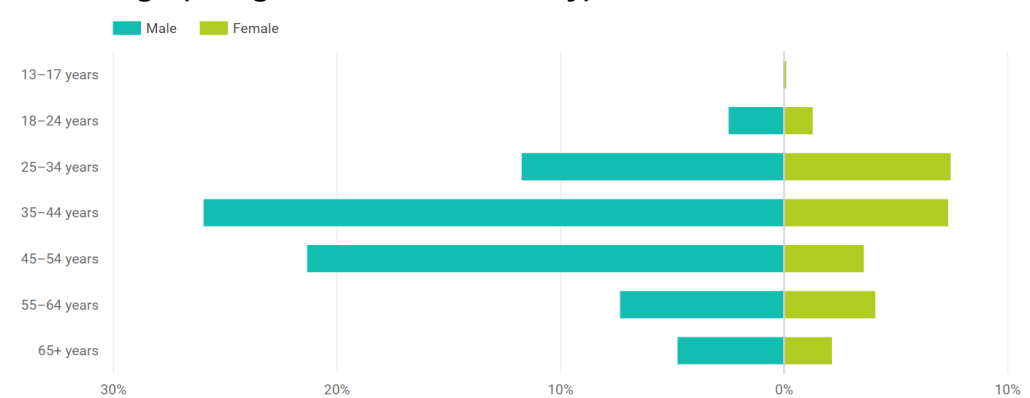
## Geographic

Country	Viewers
United Kingdom	10255
United States	1443
Italy	331
Germany	302
France	279
Russia	149
India	139
Spain	137
Greece	128
Canada	75
Others	764

## User playback


Device type	% Views
Computer	60
Mobile Phone	24
Tablet	14
TV	1.1
Unknown	0.1
Game console	0.2

## Gender/Age (Google account users only)



# 2017/8 Municipal Year - summary of YouTube analytics for meeting broadcasts [up to 19/1/2018]

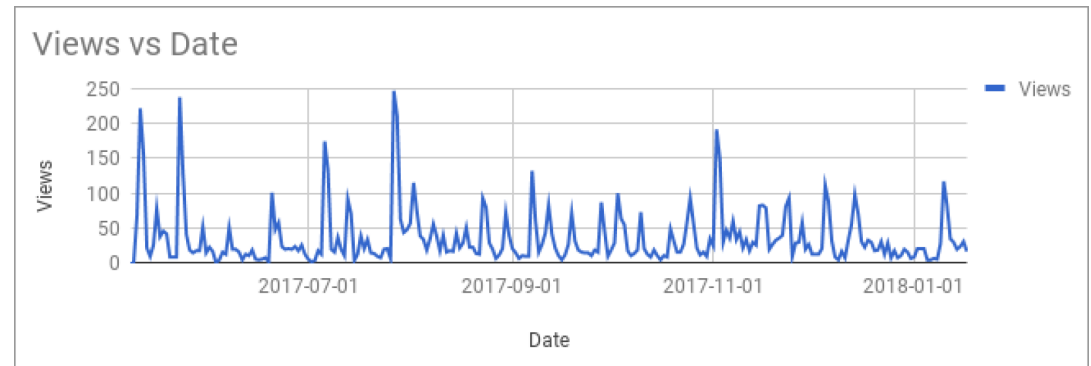
## Videos & viewings

 YouTube	No. of broadcasts	Total no. of unique viewers	Av broadcast length	Av total watch time per video (mins)	Watchtime - average time a viewer watches a video	Net subscribers gained	Shares (of video to others)	Likes	Dislikes	Watching Live vs Demand	
	64	9,241	56 mins	699 mins	5.3 mins	6	92	55	2	92% on demand, 8% live	
<b>Notes</b>	Includes additional feeds, e.g. council						On council YouTube channel through watching council meetings	Video shared via email, or other social media	Thumbs up watching	Thumbs down watching	Split between those watching live on the night and those afterwards

## Top 10 broadcasts

Meeting	Views
Cabinet - 27 July 2017	1718
Licensing Sub-Committee - Tuesday 23 May 2017	574
Council - 2 November 2017	488
Council AGM Mayor Making - 11 May 2017	463
Council - 6 July 2017	322
Council - 7 September 2017	268
Cabinet - 28 September 2017	262
Hillingdon Cabinet - 14 December 2017	255
Cabinet - 16 November 2017	216
Central & South Planning Committee - 16 May 2017	189

## Trend in views vs time of year



## Geographic

Country	Viewers
United Kingdom	5836
United States	1465
Italy	329
Germany	271
France	232
Russia	97
Spain	86
Greece	86
Belgium	77
Canada	74
Others	661

## User playback

Device type	% Views
Computer	65
Mobile Phone	21
Tablet	12
TV	1.6
Game console	0.4
Unknown	0

## Gender/Age (Google account users only)

